

From Everywhere to Everywhere

Assessing the Practice of a Denominational Mission Slogan

DAVID W. SCOTT

UMC GLOBAL MINISTRIES

DOI: 10.7252/Paper. 000074

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the uses of the phrase “from everywhere to everywhere” as an unofficial motto by The United Methodist Church’s General Board of Global Ministries. It first surveys the usage of the term in the broader Christian context. It then examines ways in which the motto’s usage at Global Ministries recognizes changes but also remains aspirational in two areas: recruitment and deployment of mission personnel and finances and structures of mission agencies. It also notes that while the phrase is sometimes used in the broader context to refer to the United States as a mission field, this usage is not prominent at Global Ministries. The paper concludes that while mission agencies must necessarily be informed by wider missiological trends, their finite nature will make them limited in their ability to fully implement these trends.

The General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church has adopted the phrase “from everywhere to everywhere” as a motto for its work. Initially used to describe missionaries sent by Global Ministries, the phrase is now used by Global Ministries and others in The United Methodist Church to describe mission generally. Examining the ways in which this motto has intersected with the work of Global Ministries provides an opportunity to assess the role of denominational mission societies within the breadth of Christian mission today. Such an examination leads to the conclusion that while specific denominational entities should be informed by wider trends in the understanding of Christian mission, they will necessarily be limited in their ability to fully live into these understandings by their histories, their structures, their stakeholders, and their finite nature.

Before continuing with my paper, a quick disclaimer is in order. Astute audience members will have noted that I myself am the Director of Mission Theology at Global Ministries. My remarks, however, should in no way be construed as representing the official views of Global Ministries. Instead, they are the personal analysis of an academic who has had the good fortune of serving as a participant-observer at the organization.

HISTORY OF A CATCHPHRASE

Global Ministries is not the only nor the first Christian entity or person to use the phrase “from everywhere to everywhere.” Indeed, this phrase has become commonplace across many disparate parts of mission-oriented Christianity.¹ The earliest published use of the phrase that I have identified came in the title of a 1991 book by Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali.² Nazir-Ali’s book had limited reception, though several other scholars did pick up on it and the phrase.³

1 I want to thank my colleague Elliott Wright for helping me track down recent references to the phrase in the Christian popular press.

2 Michael Nazir-Ali. *From Everywhere to Everywhere: A World View of Christian Witness*. (London: Flame, 1990). The book was reprinted by Wipf and Stock in 2009 with the slightly amended title *From Everywhere to Everywhere: A World View of Christian Mission*.

3 See, for instance, James E. Plueddemann, “Theological Implications of Globalizing Missions.” In *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 250; Titus Pressler, “Mission Is Ministry in the Dimension of Difference: A Definition for the Twenty-first Century.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34 no. 4 (October 2010), 201.

Additionally, the phrase seems to have been either independently reinvented by others or used without awareness of its origins, such that it is not entirely clear what the background of any particular reference is. Additional significant sources for the phrase appear to be Samuel Escobar's related phrase "from everywhere to everyone," used in the title of his widely popular 2003 book,⁴ and the use of the phrase by Dr. Michael Cassidy in an address to the 2010 Third Lausanne Congress of the Lausanne Movement in Cape Town, South Africa.⁵ Since its use at Cape Town in 2010, the popularity of the phrase has increased, including its use as a chapter title by popular Christian historian Mark Noll, though Noll does not give a source for the phrase.⁶

Within all these various instances, the phrase is used in three different ways: first, to talk about missionaries being sent "from everywhere to everywhere," second to talk about mission generally "from everywhere to everywhere," and third, to emphasize that everywhere, including the West, is now a location for mission. While missionaries and mission are conceptually related, it is important to make the distinction between the first two meanings, as the two uses do have different connotations.

GLOBAL MINISTRIES' EMBRACE OF "FROM EVERYWHERE TO EVERYWHERE"

The phrase "from everywhere to everywhere" became part of Global Ministries' lexicon in the spring of 2012 in the March/April edition of *New World Outlook* and in General Secretary Thomas Kemper's remarks to the spring board meeting of Global Ministries.⁷ In its initial use, Kemper applied the phrase

4 Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003). Escobar himself cites Nazir-Ali on p. 18. Incidentally, Allen Yeh has reversed Escobar's formulation of the phrase in the title of his recent book, *Polycentric Missiology: Twenty First Century Mission from Everyone to Everywhere* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

5 See Dion Forster, "Missionaries from everywhere to everywhere," Blog, Lausanne Movement, (October 25, 2010), <https://www.lausanne.org/about/blog/missionaries-from-everywhere-to-everywhere>, accessed May 15, 2017.

6 Mark Noll, *Protestantism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chapter 8.

7 Thomas Kemper, "Missionaries for the 21st Century," *New World Outlook* (March/April 2012), <http://www.umcmmission.org/Learn-About-Us/News-and-Stories/2012/March/Missionaries-for-the-21st-Century>, accessed May 15, 2017; Melissa Hinnen, "United Methodist Leader Affirms Importance of a Global Agency to Engage in the Church's Global Mission," News and Stories, Global Ministries (March 20, 2012),

primarily to Global Ministries' missionaries. Although Kemper wrote "that mission and missionaries must come from everywhere and be sent everywhere," the primary emphasis both in this phrase and in his writings in general seems to be on missionaries as individuals rather than on mission broadly as an activity.⁸ Its primary context was a newly developed world map showing lines linking Global Ministries missionaries' countries of origin and their countries of assignment.⁹

Yet within two years of the phrase's introduction to Global Ministries, its use began to shift from referring solely to missionaries to referring to mission in general. Debra Tyree, for instance, used the phrase in late 2013 to describe worship resources with a global consciousness.¹⁰ Kemper himself was speaking about "mission from everywhere to everywhere" as opposed to "missionaries from everywhere to everywhere" by late 2015.¹¹ When Global Ministries announced its plan to create regional offices in 2016, Rev. Mande Muyombo wrote, "The theology of our regional structure is based on our sense of mission 'from everywhere to everywhere'."¹² Muyombo's use highlights the full evolution of the phrase within Global Ministries, as it is not only linked to mission rather than just missionaries, but the quotation

<http://www.umcmision.org/Learn-About-Us/News-and-Stories/2012/March/United-Methodist-Leader-Affirms-Importance-of-a-Global-Agency-to-Engage-in-the-Church-s-Global-Mission>, accessed May 15, 2017.

8 Kemper, "Missionaries for the 21st Century." See also Thomas Kemper, "A Reflection on Missionaries Around the World," News and Stories, Global Ministries (October 2013), <http://www.umcmision.org/Learn-About-Us/News-and-Stories/2013/October/1017-A-Reflection-on-Missionaries-Around-the-World>, accessed May 15, 2017.

9 For a copy of the map, see <http://www.umcmision.org/Learn-About-Us/News-and-Stories/2012/March/United-Methodist-Leader-Affirms-Importance-of-a-Global-Agency-to-Engage-in-the-Church-s-Global-Mission>, accessed May 15, 2017.

10 Debra Tyree, "Thanksgiving Season Worship: From Everywhere to Everywhere," Calendar, Global Ministries (November 2013), <http://www.umcmision.org/Find-Resources/Calendar/Thanksgiving>, accessed May 15, 2017; Debra Tyree, "In Prayer 'With': From Everywhere to Everywhere at the Turn of the New Year," Calendar, Global Ministries (December 2013), <http://www.umcmision.org/Find-Resources/Calendar/In-Prayer-With-From-Everywhere-to-Everywhere-at-the-Turn-of-the-New-Year>, accessed May 15, 2017.

11 Thomas Kemper, "Extending the Global Mission Conversation," *New World Outlook* (November/December 2015), <http://www.umcmision.org/Find-Resources/New-World-Outlook-Magazine/New-World-Outlook-Archives/2015/November/December/1103globalmissionconversation>, accessed May 15, 2017.

12 Mande Muyombo, "No Center No Periphery: A Regional Approach to Mission," *New World Outlook* (July/August 2016), <http://www.umcmision.org/find-resources/new-world-outlook-magazine/2016/july/august/0712noperiphery>, accessed May 15, 2017.

marks indicate its use as a recognized motto or slogan within the agency. This newer use has not, however, eclipsed the original sense as applied to missionaries.¹³

MISSIONARIES FROM EVERYWHERE TO EVERYWHERE

Having established the history and meanings of this phrase, both outside and within Global Ministries, it is now time to assess why and to what end the phrase has been used. I will do so by examining both of the meanings with which it has been used by Global Ministries – its original use applied to missionaries and its broader use applied to mission in general – and its third meaning of the West as a mission field, which has not been a significant use in Global Ministries. I will deal with its application to missionaries first.

Like most American denominational mission societies, Global Ministries' past reflects traditional, Americentric concepts of mission and a traditional, American base of support. While Global Ministries and its predecessors has sponsored missionaries from a variety of nationalities for over a century, the vast majority of its missionaries have been Westerners, and the vast majority of those Westerners have been American. Nevertheless, in light of shifts in both the membership of The United Methodist Church and the composition of world Christianity as a whole, Global Ministries identified the need to alter some aspects of its historic model of operations.

In particular, Global Ministries recognized eight or nine years ago the importance of developing a missionary corps that reflected the diversity of national origins of United Methodist members and other Global Ministries partners. This was the context in which the phrase “from everywhere to everywhere” was introduced. It was intended to signify a shift in how Global Ministries thought about recruiting and deploying missionaries.

It is hard to assess how much impact this phrase has had. Already at the phrase's introduction, nearly 50% of new missionaries (including regular and young adult missionaries) sent by Global Ministries came from outside the United States.¹⁴ In contrast, 41% of regular missionaries trained in spring 2017 but 68% of young adult

¹³ See, for instance, Joy Kitanga, “Global Mission Fellows: From Everywhere to Everywhere,” News and Stories, Global Ministries (December 2016), <http://www.umcmision.org/learn-about-us/news-and-stories/2016/december/1229global-mission-fellows-from-everywhere-to-everywhere>, accessed May 15, 2017.

¹⁴ Hinnen, “United Methodist Leader.”

missionaries trained in summer and fall 2016 were from outside the United States, for a combined total of 62% of new missionaries from outside the United States.¹⁵

While these data are clear, their significance is not. Why is there a difference between regular and young adult missionaries? Are these indicators of long-term trends or merely data points? 62% is greater than the percentage of United Methodist members outside the US, but since Global Ministries works with partners from other denominational traditions, what should be the goal? Whatever the goal, does this figure represent progress? If so, how much of it is attributable to use of the slogan? The answers to these and other questions are hard to say.

Two conclusions at least do, however, seem reasonable. First, the slogan reflects long-term shifts in missionary recruitment, whether or not it has had any short term causal role in these shifts. Two decades or more ago, the percentage of Global Ministries missionaries coming from outside the United States would have been nowhere near 50%. Thus, at very least, the use of the phrase applied to missionaries has helped crystalize an understanding of a process already underway.

Second, and perhaps not surprisingly, the use of the slogan has not resolved all issues around developing an international group of missionary personnel. One colleague asserted that the map intended to reflect the shift in missionaries to a “from everywhere to everywhere” model actually reflected on-going American dominance. Some host locations still prefer American missionaries because they are seen as having more access to American funds. All missionaries, regardless of their national origin, are asked to itinerate and raise funds in the United States. US Visas remain an issue for some missionary candidates, which can complicate training and prohibit some pairings of sending and receiving “everywheres.” Certain categories of mission service are only open to those from the United States or those from outside the United States for a variety of historical, practical, and strategic reasons. Some current policies only recognize a single national origin for missionaries, though

15 “United Methodist Church to Send 45 New Young Adult Missionaries,” News and Stories, Global Ministries (July 2016), <http://www.umcmmission.org/learn-about-us/news-and-stories/2016/july/0728newyoungadultmissionaries>, accessed May 15, 2017; “Jesus Calls...Young United Methodist Missionaries Follow,” News and Stories, Global Ministries (August 2016), <http://www.umcmmission.org/learn-about-us/news-and-stories/2016/august/0804jesuscalls>, accessed May 15, 2017; Elliott Wright and Ivy Couch, “Seventeen New United Methodist Missionaries to be Blessed and Sent in Near Future,” News and Stories, Global Ministries (May 2017), <http://www.umcmmission.org/learn-about-us/news-and-stories/2017/may/0502seventeen-new-united-methodist-missionaries-to-be-blessed-and-sent-in-near-future>, accessed May 15, 2017.

some missionaries may be dual citizens.¹⁶ Mission remains a complex endeavor, perhaps even more so in the wake of the shift in mission personnel.

MISSION FROM EVERYWHERE TO EVERYWHERE

I turn now from analyzing missionaries as from everywhere to everywhere to analyzing mission as from everywhere to everywhere. This shift raises the question of what is entailed in mission apart from missionaries. Certainly, one could give theological answers to this question – the Holy Spirit or the movement of God is involved. Yet, in terms of tangible, this-worldly components of mission beyond missionaries, two that stand out are resources and organizations. I will thus address both topics.

While Global Ministries has achieved some level of success in making changes in its pool of missionary personnel, its funding remains overwhelmingly American. United Methodists from the United States give the majority of support both through denominational funds (called the World Service Fund) and through direct gifts. Money is certainly not the only resource or asset involved in mission, but its ability to be translated into other resources makes it perhaps the most important. Moreover, Global Ministries has successfully sought to increase levels of mission self-support through programs such as the In Mission Together program and 50/50 Covenant Partnerships. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority of the money that Global Ministries transfers from one country to another goes from the United States to elsewhere.

This arrangement arises from a confluence of factors. First is historic precedent in how denominational funds are collected and how gifts to Global Ministries are cultivated. Closely related to and intertwined with these patterns is an older notion of mission that sees mission as flowing from the US to the rest of the world. This understanding persists in many places in The United Methodist Church at large, limiting the extent to which Global Ministries can attempt to shift funding patterns. Nevertheless, the action by the UMC's recent General Conference to approve a plan to collect some denominational funds from outside the US represents a step forward. Moreover, a slogan such as "from everywhere to everywhere" has the potential to provoke further conversations about how resources (economic and otherwise) are shared in the UMC.

16 This point was made to me by a colleague in a personal email.

The second cause for the dominance of American money is the massive economic inequalities among nations in the current world system. A large part of the reason money flows from the United States to the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, and not the other way around, is that the DRC has a per capita GDP that is 1% that of the US. Money flows from the US because there is more money in the US than most other locations in the world. While Global Ministries works for economic justice, producing substantial, systemic changes to global economic inequalities is probably beyond the agency's ability.

Yet, even when United Methodists try to send money in the “reverse direction,” it can be rebuffed because of persistent old understandings of mission. A colleague told me of a Zimbabwean United Methodist congregation that took up a collection to support a Swiss United Methodist congregation that was struggling to stay open. The Swiss refused the Zimbabweans' money, offending them in the process. Such an attitude goes against Global Ministries' emphasis on mutuality, but reflects the challenges of its ecclesial context.

The third reason that Global Ministries money flows from the United States is the existence of alternate United Methodist mission agencies in Europe, the location of the other financially well-to-do United Methodist units. The branches of The United Methodist Church in Germany, Switzerland, and Norway all have their own mission agencies, which serve as the primary conduit for money from these economically advanced nations to mission partners in less well-economically advanced countries.

This third point raises the question of whether mission agencies themselves can be “from everywhere to everywhere.” Essentially, there are two sides to this debate. One argues that mission agencies can transcend their national origins to become truly global organizations that, while perhaps headquartered in a particular country, function through the contributions and ownership of supporters and staff from many countries, if not quite everywhere. This is the approach that Global Ministries is attempting to take.

One significant aspect of Global Ministries' efforts in this regard is the creation of regional offices around the world. As Muyombo explains, “These regional offices will provide valuable on-the-ground resources, enabling Global Ministries to be more fully present, regularly engaged, and quickly and easily responsive to the global church and its partners in key world regions.” He continues, “[O]ur sense today is that there isn't a center anymore—that doing mission lies in mutuality,

looking at each other as equal partners and learning from one another.”¹⁷ These regional offices in Asia, Latin America, and Africa will be staffed primarily by employees with roots in the area. Furthermore, Global Ministries’ staff members in its Atlanta headquarters come from a wide variety of countries, though the majority are probably from the United States.¹⁸

There are certainly challenges to Global Ministries’ attempt to become a mission agency that is from everywhere and not just an American agency. As mentioned, the headquarters is in the US, the majority of staff come from the US, the majority of current missionaries are from the US (even if the trend has been toward more missionaries from outside the US), and the significant majority of funding comes from the US. Large portions of the policies employed at the agency are taken from US corporate culture. At what point in the organization’s development does it become a truly global organization and not just an American organization with global features? The answer is not clear.

Moreover, there are those who would argue that the goal for mission that goes from everywhere to everywhere is not to have mission agencies that send missionaries from everywhere but to have mission agencies everywhere that send missionaries. James Plueddemann, for instance, argues, “Mission agencies will need to expand their focus from evangelism and church planting to mission-agency planting. Mission agencies must change organizational structures so they can partner with the mission agencies that grow out of the churches they helped to plant.”¹⁹

As noted, The United Methodist Church already has indigenous mission agencies in Germany, Switzerland, and Norway. An alternative approach to Global Ministries’ current approach would be to facilitate the development of additional United Methodist mission agencies in the Philippines, DRC, Mozambique, Liberia, etc. I am not recommending that Global Ministries take such a strategy; I am only noting that such a strategy would also be consistent with mission “from everywhere

17 Muyombo, “No Center No Periphery.”

18 “Who Makes Up Global Ministries’ Staff?” *New World Outlook* (November/December 2015),

<http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/New-World-Outlook-Magazine/New-World-Outlook-Archives/2015/November/December/1111globalministriesstaff>, accessed May 15, 2017, found that 58% of staff responding to an internal survey were from the US. There has been substantial staff turnover since then, but my sense is that the figure is probably similar today.

19 Plueddemann, 264-5.

to everywhere.” Hence, such a motto must still be interpreted, especially when it comes to how to structure organizations to support this type of mission.

FROM EVERYWHERE TO THE UNITED STATES?

One final meaning of the phrase “from everywhere to everywhere” shifts the emphasis from the *from* everywhere portion (which is the focus of the prior two meaning) to the *to* everywhere portion. In particular, it emphasizes that the West, historically the sending region for missionaries and mission, is now a receiving region for missionaries and mission. While this sense of the phrase has been present elsewhere in the missiological conversation, it has largely not been part of Global Ministries’ and United Methodists’ use of the phrase. The reasons are complex, with a variety of factors internal to The United Methodist Church at play.

First, Global Ministries does and has long done mission work in the United States. While recruiting significant numbers of missionaries from outside the US is a new development for Global Ministries, deploying missionaries within the US is not a new development. Hence, Global Ministries has used the phrase to highlight the former and not the latter. The majority of missionaries deployed in the US are from the US (not “everywhere”), but as previously noted, visa restrictions outside Global Ministries’ control reinforce this pattern.

Second, like other American denominations, The United Methodist Church has historically had many organizations designed to carry out some portion of its mission within the United States, but only a mission agency to carry out mission outside the United States. Exacerbating this distinction between domestic and foreign programs are the distinctions between mission and evangelism and mission and social concerns. The United Methodist Church as a whole has not yet discerned what constitutes mission and what separates mission from other areas of endeavor apart from geographic boundaries. Such conversations are underway as part of efforts to shift the denomination into a more global mode, but questions about mission and geography remain outstanding. Moreover, even while leaders are engaging in such conversations, many United Methodists remain tied to older ways of understanding mission, as previously noted.

Third, many American United Methodists struggle with a sense of lost cultural place and have been hesitant to embrace an understanding of the church’s role in the United States that sees the US as primarily a mission field

as opposed to “home territory.” While Global Ministries has certainly supported efforts to encourage Americans to develop a more missional understanding of their own context, such efforts have not been a major area of focus for the agency.

It is not necessarily a problem or failure that Global Ministries has not much explored this third meaning of “from everywhere to everywhere.” Certainly, agencies can use their discretion to set their priorities and use language in one way and not another. It will be interesting to see, however, whether this third sense of the phrase will become more important at some later point in the organization’s development.

CONCLUSION

I hope this exploration of Global Ministries’ use of the phrase “from everywhere to everywhere” has accomplished several things. First, I hope it has provided a good examination of the possible meanings inherent in this phrase, which has become prominent not only in United Methodist circles but in mission circles broadly. Second, I hope it has highlighted the ways in which history, context, and structure all affect the ways in which a particular organization can live out this (or any other) mission slogan. Third and finally, I hope it has affirmed that mission in its totality is far beyond the ability of any one organization, no matter how well-run, to reflect in its practices. Mission is ultimately God’s mission, or the *missio Dei*, and God requires the sincere, faithful, and earnest efforts of all Christians from everywhere through all organizational channels to participate in that mission to everywhere.